NEWSLETTER

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THE ORIENTAL CERAMIC SOCIETY

Letter from the President

Dear Members

This is both a celebration of the fantastic work that Dr. George Manginis did for so many years on developing the *OCS Newsletter* and an exciting new venture for Dr. Teresa Canepa and Beth Gardiner working with the designer and production team. We are so fortunate in the Society to have such knowledgeable and creative people.

In this *Newsletter* we have scholars participating from many different parts of the globe including the United States, Mexico, Europe, Japan and China. The combination of innovative short research articles, news and features from around the world is extremely exciting to read and complements the *Transactions* beautifully. One of the strengths of the Society is its diversity and topics included are truly varied from excavations in Cambodia, to an exhibition of work by a Scottish photographer living in Singapore and Hong Kong just decades after the advent of photography, and Chinese and Japanese lacquer ware. It is also a very exciting time to be involved with Asian Art with so many new exhibitions bringing the past to life and this issue will include some highlights of the many shows to visit across the world.

Activities for members are not just confined to original lectures and handling sessions. The Society is very much looking forward to the conference in Dresden in June and the next OCS tour to Madrid from 24th to 28th September 2018. In Spain members will enjoy Chinese Ming and Qing porcelain in museums, palaces and monasteries in Madrid and the surrounding areas. These trips provide an opportunity for enthusiasts of all sorts to exchange ideas on Asian art topics. In London, we have some really outstanding speakers who will present their latest research at the Society of Antiquaries with Dr. Tang Hui and Dr. Sarah Cheang our next speakers.

Best wishes,
Jessica Harrison-Hall

Research

Ming Dramas as Sources for the Dancing Scene on Coromandel Lacquer Screens and Kangxi Porcelains

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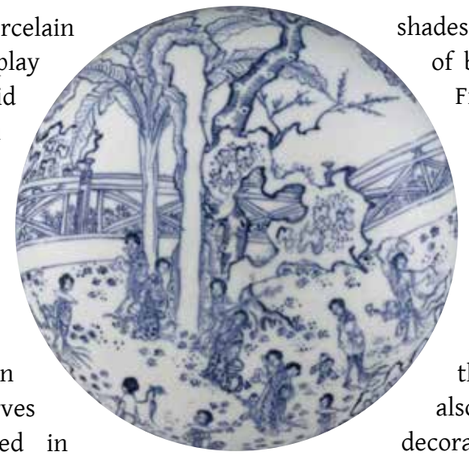
An interesting circular porcelain box is on long-term display in the Sir Percival David Collection at the British Museum in London. Located at the very bottom of a display case (Case 24, Shelf 1), it is sometimes missed by visitors. Yet the exquisite narrative decoration on the cover of this box deserves serious attention. Painted in underglaze cobalt blue are twelve female figures with six joyful children in the elegant setting of a garden (fig. 1). The figures are centred around an outcrop of huge *taihu* rocks, a banana tree and a plum tree. Three women are sitting on stools, one playing a musical instrument, called a *pipa*, while the other two lean towards her. To the right is a female dancer: her eyes are closed and arms stretched, as if she is enjoying the moment.



Does she look familiar? A keen observer would recall the frequent repetition of dancing scenes depicted on Jingdezhen porcelain produced during the Kangxi period (1662–1722) of the Qing dynasty. For instance, a five-piece garniture in the Victoria and Albert Museum bears images of a female dancer with the same gesture and costume as the one in the British Museum. Three pieces of this garniture are currently on view (V&A, Room 137, Case 10, Shelf 4). Another garniture, quite similar to that in the V&A in terms of the shape of the vases, shades of cobalt blue and style of brush strokes was part of Frederick Leyland's (1831–1892) famous Peacock Room now on display in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Dancing scenes appeared not only on Jingdezhen porcelain of the Kangxi period, but also featured as the central decoration on Coromandel lacquer folding screens, which were transported to Europe during the second half of the seventeenth century. Classified as a specific type of Chinese lacquerware today, the term 'Coromandel lacquer' in reality is an early twentieth-century western invention, which came to be used because it was shipped to Europe via the Coromandel coast of southeast India. This type of lacquerware began to arrive in Europe no later than 1682. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it was more commonly referred to as 'Bantam Work' after the name of the Dutch East India Company or VOC's trading port in Java, which was abandoned in 1817. In China, however, this type of lacquer was named after its style of production: *kuancai*. About one hundred

Fig. 1 Circular porcelain box. China, Jingdezhen. 1662–1700, Kangxi period, Qing dynasty. Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue decoration. h. 9 cm, d. 17.3 cm. Inv. No. PDF A620. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 2. Qiu Ying (*c.* 1494–1552), detail, [Spring Morning in the Han Palace]. China, Jiajing period (1522–1566), Ming dynasty. Ink and colour on silk. h. 30.6 cm, w. 574.1 cm. Inv. No. 011001038. © National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 3. Twelve-fold Coromandel lacquer screen, detail of the seventh panel from left. China, 1685–1695, Kangxi period, Qing dynasty. Carved lacquer and inlaid enamels on wood. h. 290 cm, w. 600 cm. Inv. No. EAX.5331 © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Photo by author.

Fig. 4. Twelve-fold Coromandel lacquer screen, detail of the sixth panel from left. China, *c.* 1692, Kangxi period, Qing dynasty. Carved lacquer and inlaid enamels on wood. h. 153.2 cm, w. 306 cm. Inv. No. 37333. Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Photo by author.

years before the arrival of Coromandel lacquer in Europe, a Chinese lacquer master named Huang Cheng (active 1567–72) finished a book entitled *Xiu shi lu* (Account of the Decoration of Lacquer), in which he elaborated thoroughly on the styles and manufacturing crafts of Chinese lacquer. This technical treatise was published in 1625 by a later craftsman, Yang Ming, and is considered the foremost ancient Chinese text on lacquer. The *Xiu shi lu* consists of eighteen chapters. At the beginning of the treatise, Huang Cheng records the preparation of raw materials and tools, various flaws of the materials, and the possible causes. The majority of the chapters categorize fourteen types of lacquer decoration, while the final two chapters deal with production, conservation, and the making of archaic works. In the tenth chapter, the author gives a concise description on the styles of decoration achieved by carving and hollowing the lacquer surface. The *kuancai* technique requires more sophisticated skills by the artisans, as there are more procedures to follow than carved red or black lacquerware. After incising layers of dried lacquer, the artisan needs to fill in the gaps with coloured lacquer or oil, and gold or silver when necessary. The true *kuancai* process includes multiple colours.

The technique of *kuancai* allows for more possibilities for the vivid representation of figures, animals, architectural details and landscapes. In the meantime, artisans were able to imitate the various colours and even texture of the objects carved on lacquer. Moreover, the form of the twelve-fold lacquer screen provides an appropriate surface for horizontal composition, as well as echoes the form of large-scale scroll paintings and makes a perfect surface for the transfer of an image from a painting to a piece of lacquer. Therefore, it is no surprise to find that one of the most popular paintings of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the *Hangong chunxiao* (Spring Morning in the Han Palace) created by Qiu Ying (c.1494–1552), was among the artistic themes transferred and used most frequently on lacquer folding screens (fig. 2).

Coromandel lacquer folding screens featuring the theme of 'Spring Morning in the Han Palace' can be found in many public and private collections in Europe and North America. At the Ashmolean Museum a massive and exquisite Coromandel lacquer folding screen is on view (in the entrance to Room 35 on the second floor). Its seventh panel depicts the central hall of a palace, where a high-ranking male official is gazing at two female dancers performing on a red carpet (fig. 3). Some screens were inscribed on the reverse, indicating that the object was a gift for the occasion of a birthday or retirement. For instance, a twelve-panel folding screen in the Freer Gallery of Art can be dated, according to its inscriptions, to 1672. The inscription also directly describes the scene as 'Spring Morning in the Han Palace'.

In some versions, the dancing scenes are performed by a single actress. In the Museum of Decorative Arts in Dresden, a smaller folding screen dated 1692 is on display at the end of the Museum's west wing. In it, a single dancer is carved and painted, performing outside the hall of a palace (fig. 4). Qing-dynasty lacquer workers specifically depicted the dancing scenes with different pictorial motifs, the majority of which were the birthday celebration of Tang-dynasty general Guo Ziyi (698–781) and the Spring Morning. In many cases, the dancers remain anonymous. However, in late Ming woodblock-printed drama books, the dancers were given certain defining characteristics within the theatrical context.

Yu he ji (Jade box) is a drama written by Mei Dingzuo (1549–1615) in *c.*1585 and published in 1610. It tells the story of a Tang-dynasty scholar Han Hong (active Tianbao period 742–56, titled *Jinshi* in 754) and his lover Ms. Liu. Liu was a former performer in the official Tang entertaining house at Zhangtai. As an engagement gift, Han gave his lover a jade box before the Lushan Rebellion separated the couple. Liu stayed in a Buddhist temple, while Han served as military adviser for General Hou Xiyi. After the war, Han returned to the capital and unexpectedly met Liu, only to find that his lover had been captured by a nomad general named Sha Zhali. Liu gave the jade box back to Han as proof that she took it wherever she

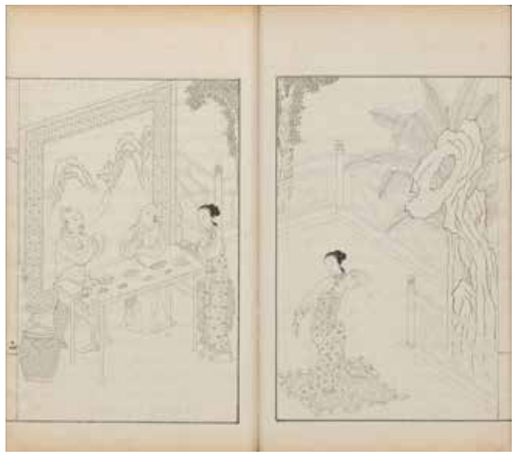


Fig. 5. Mei Dingzuo (1549–1615), book illustration, [The jade box], annotation atrributed to Li Zhi (1527–1602). China, Hangzhou, Rongyutang workshop. 1610, Wanli period, Ming dynasty. Woodblock print. h. 22.3 cm, w. 13.7 cm. Inv. No. 15105. National Central Library, Taipei.

Fig. 6. Wang Tingne (1573–1619), book illustration, [Huancui tang newly edited story of peach]. China, Anhui Province. Before 1619, Wanli period (1573–1620), Ming dynasty. Reprinted by Wang Licheng (1883–1936). Woodblock print. h. 21.5 cm, w. 13.9 cm. Inv. No. T5687/3110. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.

went. At a celebration for the triumph over the rebellion, the scholar turned to the senior General Xu Jun for help. In the illustration of the thirty-seventh chapter *Huan yu* (the return of the jade), Han Hong and General Xu sit together enjoying wine and music. With a smile on their faces, they both stare at a woman performing the sleeve dance on a carpet (fig. 5) and it is at this moment that Han employed this powerful ally to put himself at risk to rescue Liu. Immediately upon hearing the couple's story, General Xu left the banquet, rode to the mansion of the nomad general, and escaped with Liu before anyone noticed. Liu returned to her lover.

Another illustrated drama, follows a similar narrative pattern. The *Tou tao ji* (Story of the Peach), published during the late Wanli period (1600–20), tells the story of a Song-dynasty student Pan Yongzhong and his lover, Huang Shunhua. The couple took a secret oath together, but a villain, Xie Duan, made every effort to break them apart. Xie Duan, who is the brother-in-law of the emperor and a senior politician, aggressively proposed to marry Shunhua, and threatened her father, General Huang. The Huang family was forced to agree to the marriage. In the twentieth chapter titled, *Qiu huai* (Yearning in the Autumn), Pan missed his lover terribly. He was lured by his friend into a brothel. There they met with the Wang sisters, the elder excelled in singing and the latter in dancing. In an illustration accompanying the narrative, Pan (on the left of fig. 6) politely refused his young friend's invitation to get drunk and forget about Shunhua. Singing was difficult to illustrate for Ming artisans, therefore the seduction of the Wang sisters is depicted as a dancing scene.

Other examples of late Ming dramas can be found where the motif of dancing is used to underline the theatrical moments of the story. The floral gowns of the dancers, their flowing sleeves, and fine hairstyles all enhanced the theatricality of the narration, which often lead to a turning point in the plot.

In conclusion, while comparing and contrasting the narrative scenes on lacquer folding screens, the painted designs on porcelain, the illustrations in books and written words of dramas, there are many intriguing questions raised for collectors, curators, and scholars.

Archaeological Excavations at the Port of Acapulco, Mexico

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In 2015 archaeological work began at the port of Acapulco in a project administered by PAMPA (Maritime Archaeology Project of the Port of Acapulco). The project examines the history of Acapulco, which in the sixteenth century was designated the only official port of the Spanish colonies in the New World to trade with Asia through the Manila Galleons. The Manila Galleon Trade ran from 1565, when the Spanish discovered the return route from the Philippines across the Pacific Ocean, to 1815 when the Mexican Independence put an end to 250 years of continuous navigation. So far, the project has yielded a rich collection of materials including, Asian stoneware, Mexican majolica, Spanish and Peruvian ceramic containers, English earthenware and above all, over 6,000 shards of Chinese porcelain. The porcelain shards date from the early period of the Spanish trans-Pacific trade route in the 1560s to the early nineteenth century. The archaeological work taking place in Acapulco has consisted of excavations in two parts of the city, with the goal of documenting both trade and daily life.

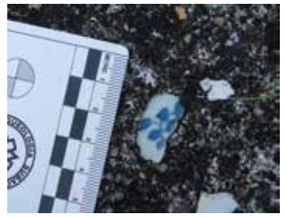

Fig. 1 Excavation unit on the outer wall of the Fortress of San Diego, Acapulco. SAS/INAH

Fig. 2 Porcelain fragment in the wall of the Fortress of San Diego, Acapulco. SAS/INAH

The first archaeological excavation was at the Fort of San Diego, which was built after the Manila Galleon route was established and Acapulco was designated the official port (fig. 1). Construction began in December 1615 and was completed on February 4, 1617. An opening ceremony was held on April 15 of that year. Following a proposal by the Dutch engineer Adrian Boot, the structure was originally built as a castle in the form of an irregular pentagon perched upon rocks. Except for one occasion – the seizure of the port in 1624 for one week by Dutch pirates – Acapulco was an impregnable bastion throughout the colonial period. An earthquake of great magnitude hit the area on April 2, 1776 which damaged the structure of the fortress considerably. The reconstruction work began on March 16, 1778, concluding on July 7, 1783. The new fortress was built with stone, surrounded by a moat, and housed up to two thousand people with food, ammunition and drinking water for a whole year. Four archaeological excavation pits (each of two meters by one metre) were opened in different parts along the periphery of the fortress, which yielded a rich collection of objects. In addition, porcelain fragments were found in the walls, incrusted in the cement between the stones (fig. 2).